

May 2016

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Mojave-Southern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council (RAC): The Mojave-Southern Great Basin RAC's Basin and Range National Monument Subcommittee will meet Wednesday, May 11, in Alamo. The Planning and Recreation subcommittees will meet Wednesday, May 18, in Henderson. The BLM will meet with the Mojave-Southern Great Basin RAC on Thursday, May 19, in Henderson. *(See page 9 for more information)*

Lincoln County Land Sales: The BLM Ely District, Caliente Field Office is seeking public input on proposed public land sales in Lincoln County, Nev. The deadline to provide input is Monday, May 30. *(See page 5 for more information)*

## **BASIN AND RANGE NATIONAL MONUMENT**

The BLM Ely District is preparing a Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS) for the Basin and Range National Monument. Public scoping is scheduled in late spring/early summer 2016. A Draft EIS is expected in 2017 and a Final EIS in 2018. Learn more about the Monument online at <http://on.doi.gov/1LT79wP>.

## **ELY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Resource The Nevada and Northeastern California Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment (ARMPA) amended the Ely District Resource Management Plan (RMP) (2008) in September, 2015. Changes to the Ely RMP from the ARMPA, as well as two other amendments, are being incorporated into the RMP. The Ely District anticipates having both an electronic and hard copy versions of the up-to-date, amended RMP available for the public in spring 2016.

## **WATERSHED ANALYSIS**

The Ely District continues to develop and use watershed-level planning as a tool to identify high priority habitat improvement projects for Greater Sage-Grouse and other wildlife species, hazardous fuels reduction, and other needed actions to improve the health of public lands.

Watershed analysis has been completed for 27 of 61 priority watersheds on the District. Watershed Implementation Plans have been completed for nine. The Ely District is currently working on watershed planning for the following priority watershed areas: South Spring and Hamblin Valley (Schell Field Office); Long Valley / Ruby Marshes and Butte Valley (Egan Field Office).

## **SAGE GROUSE PLANNING**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) on Sept. 22, 2015, determined that the greater Sage-Grouse does not warrant protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The FWS reached this determination after evaluating the bird's population status, along with the collective efforts by the BLM and U.S. Forest Service, state agencies, private landowners and other partners to conserve its habitat.

The BLM and USFS announced that they have issued Records of Decisions amending 98 land use plans, including the Ely District's Resource Management Plan that will help conserve Greater Sage-Grouse habitat and support sustainable economic development. The land use plans were developed during a multi-year process in partnership with the states and local partners, guided by the best available science and technical advice from the FWS. Information about the land use plans, FAQs, fact sheets, and other information can be found on the BLM Nevada's website at

[http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/prog/wildlife/greater\\_sage-grouse.html](http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/prog/wildlife/greater_sage-grouse.html)

## **ENERGY**

### **Natural Gas-fired Energy Development -**

Toquop Energy Project: The BLM has issued a Notice to Proceed to Toquop Energy, Inc., for a natural gas-fired power plant. Construction can start once the proponent satisfies conditions outlined in the Notice.

### **Solar Energy Development -**

Dry Lake Valley North Solar Energy Zone: The BLM in March 2016 issued the Final Regional Mitigation Strategy for the 25,069-acre Dry Lake Valley North Solar Energy Zone (SEZ) located in Lincoln County, Nev. The Dry Lake Valley North SEZ is the largest of the five SEZs in Nevada and, when fully built, could produce up to 4,000 MW of renewable energy. It is located about 15 miles west of Pioche and 15 miles northwest of Caliente. The SEZ is framed by the North Pahroc Range to the west, and the West Range, Bristol Range, Highland Range, Ely Springs Range, Black Canyon Range, and Burnt Springs Range to the east. The strategy is available on the [Dry Lake Valley North Project Website](http://on.doi.gov/1frnwSM) at <http://on.doi.gov/1frnwSM>.

### **Electrical Transmission Development -**

TransWest Express Project: The BLM has released the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the TransWest Express Transmission Project. The Record of Decision is scheduled for release in late May 2016. The 730-mile transmission line project would extend from Wyoming, through Colorado and Utah, to southern Nevada through the southeast corner of Lincoln County and deliver up to 3,000 megawatts of electric power to major load centers, including Las Vegas and San Diego, Calif., by tapping in to wind energy resources in southern Wyoming. The BLM Wyoming State Office is the lead office for the project.

## **FIRE**

### Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation –

Diamond Fire: Drill seeding was delayed slightly due to a significant snowstorm in late March. Aerial seeding has been completed in cooperation with the Nevada Department of Wildlife. A temporary fire fence remaining from a previous event will be removed as weather permits.

East Schell Bench Wildlife Habitat Protection and Restoration Project: The BLM is planting 25,000 bitterbrush seedlings at the site.

### Fuels Reduction/Habitat Restoration –

Ward Mountain Restoration Project: The BLM in summer 2016 will issue a Decision Record based on analysis in the final environmental assessment. The Forest Service has already issued a final Decision and Finding of No Significant Impact. The BLM, Forest Service and Ely Shoshone Tribe are partnering on the project that would use manual and mechanical treatment methods and prescribed fire to restore health to vegetative communities and improve wildlife habitat, and reduce the catastrophic wildfire risk on Ward Mountain near Ely. The proposed 100,000-acre project area consists of 53,731 acres of the public lands, 39,264 acres of Forest Service lands, and 2,507 acres of Tribal lands.

Overland Pass Habitat Improvement Project: The BLM in summer 2016 will start manually thinning pinion-juniper on about 6,000 acres along the southern flank of the Ruby Mountains in Elko and White Pine counties. Chaining will begin south of Overland Pass Road in fall 2016. Over a 10-year period, about 18,500 acres of a 45,200-acre project area will be treated using manual and mechanical methods and prescribed fire. The wildlife habitat improvement project that will benefit Greater Sage-grouse, mule deer, pronghorn antelope and more is collaboration between the BLM, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, and Nevada Department of Wildlife.

Kern Mountain Landscape Restoration Project: The BLM in 2016-2017 will burn slash piles remaining from pinion-juniper thinning treatments completed in 2015. The finished project will restore watershed health, reduce catastrophic wildfire risk, and improve wildlife habitat, including that of Greater Sage-grouse.

Egan and Johnson Basins Restoration Project: The BLM in June 2016 will release for public review and comment a preliminary environmental assessment for a project that would reduce catastrophic wildfire risk and improve Greater Sage-grouse habitat in the Egan and Johnson basins, five miles west of Cherry Creek. The project would treat up to 65-percent of a 35,000-acre project area. Proposed treatments include manual and mechanical pinion-juniper tree-thinning, treating invasive plant species, e.g., cheatgrass; and prescribed fire use.

## Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Ely District Update

Duck Creek Basin Fuels Reduction and Habitat Improvement Project: The BLM in fall 2016 will release for public review and comment a preliminary environmental assessment for a project that would improve Greater Sage-grouse habitat and create fuels breaks in urban interface areas of Duck Creek Basin. The proposed project would compliment already-completed work on neighboring Forest Service and private lands.

Aspen/ Sagebrush Steppe Joint Restoration Project (Great Basin National Park): The BLM in 2016 will conduct a prescribed burn in Box Canyon on Mt. Washington. When complete, the multi-year project will have restored about 1,000 acres of Aspen and sagebrush communities through the use of prescribed fire and mechanical treatments. The BLM's hazardous fuels program and SNPLMA are providing project funding.

Combs Creek: The multi-year pinion-juniper tree-thinning project calls for treating between 4,500 to 7,000 acres of the public lands in south Butte Valley, about 20 miles northwest of Ely, to improve Greater Sage-Grouse habitat. The BLM, Great Basin Institute and Nevada Conservation Corps have so far hand-thinned or masticated about 1,150 acres. The BLM expects to masticate 300 additional acres in 2016. Acreage masticated to date has been seeded with assistance from the Nevada Department of Wildlife, which is providing Heritage Fund Program dollars for the project through the White Pine County Wildlife Advisory Board.

Patterson Pass Sage Grouse Habitat Improvement Project: Greater Sage-Grouse population monitoring began in March 2016 with the collaring and tagging of hens with GPS units. The data collected will be compared with pre-treatment data to determine the project's effectiveness. Collaborating on the project are Utah State University, Nevada Department of Wildlife, and BLM Color Country (Utah) and Ely districts.

Shingle Creek Aspen Restoration Project: Weather permitting, the BLM in winter 2016-2017 will burn slash piles of white fir. Removing the conifers promotes aspen regeneration and health. The project area is in the Snake Range near Great Basin National Park, about 40 miles southeast of Ely.

North Antelope Habitat Restoration Project: The BLM in fiscal year 2017 will masticate pinion-juniper on about 300 acres of the 12,000-acre project area. The habitat improvement project at the north end of the Antelope Range, 70 miles northeast of Ely, is approximately 85-percent complete.

Cold Springs Project: Weather permitting, the contractor for the pinion-juniper tree-thinning project will remove the thinned trees from the project area. The now-completed project provides a hazardous fuels break, as well as a demonstration area exhibiting various tree-thinning densities.

South Steptoe Valley Watershed Restoration Project: The BLM in late summer/early fall 2016 will hand-thin pinion-juniper on the west side of South Steptoe Valley near Comins Lake. The BLM will also thin pinion-juniper near Horse Camp Wash.

## Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Ely District Update

Lake Valley Restoration Project: The BLM plans in fall 2016 to resume chaining and hand-thinning of pinion-juniper in Lake Valley as prescribed for in the Cave and Lake Valley Watershed Restoration Plan. The treatments will benefit potential Greater Sage-Grouse habitat.

Bald Mountain Restoration Project: The BLM expects in summer/fall 2016 to begin treatments in the Bald Mountain Treatment Unit of the Newark and Huntington Watershed Restoration Plan. The Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act-funded project will treat approximately 1,600 acres of the public lands to benefit wildlife, as well as restore about 25 acres of aspen.

Newark and Huntington Watershed Restoration Project: The sage-grouse habitat improvement project is in the planning phase with BLM mapping treatment areas in the southern portion of Newark Valley. Plans call for hand-thinning pinion-juniper on about 3,000 acres of the public lands near the southern part of the Pancake Range in fall/winter 2016 with additional mastication treatments scheduled in 2017.

### LANDS & REALTY

Lincoln County Land Sales: The BLM Ely District, Caliente Field Office is seeking public input on proposed public land sales in Lincoln County, Nev. The deadline to provide input is Monday, May 30. The BLM is asking the public to help identify issues that should be considered in the potential sale of 24 parcels, consisting of 1,077 acres of the public lands, as directed through the Lincoln County Conservation, Recreation, and Development Act of 2004.

Land Disposals: The BLM Ely District, Caliente Field Office is currently processing three land sales, i.e., the Windmill Sale, Cowboy Sale and Hiko Sale. Lincoln County Round 3 is also being processed for four areas: Alamo, Caliente, Panaca and Pioche. White Pine County Round 2 is being processed for three sales located within Ely and McGill.

### MINERALS

#### Active Mining Plans –

Bald Mountain Mine: The BLM Ely District is preparing a final Environmental Impact Statement for Barrick Gold U.S Inc.'s proposed Bald Mountain Mine North and South Operations Area Projects. A Record of Decision is expected in 2016. The open-pit gold mine expansion would be located in the Bald Mountain Mining District in White Pine County, Nev., approximately 65 miles northwest of Ely. The proposed Project would be located on BLM-administered lands and include expansion of the Bald Mountain Mine North and South Operations Areas for an additional 7,097 acres of disturbance.

North Operations Area: Combining and expanding the existing Bald Mountain Mine North Operations Area (NOA) Plan of Operations (Plan) boundary and the existing

## Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Ely District Update

Casino/Winrock Mine Plan boundary into a unified Plan boundary called the proposed NOA Project would increase the total surface disturbance from 9,381 acres to 13,738 acres and add four new heap leach pads.

**South Operations Area:** In the South Operations Area (SOA), the existing Alligator Ridge Mine and Yankee Mine plans would be expanded and combined into a unified Plan called the proposed South Operations Area (SOA) Project, which would increase the total surface disturbance from 939 acres to 3,679 acres. The South Operation Area Project Plan of Operations would also include an electrical transmission line and an access road between the North and South operations areas.

**Gold Rock Mine Project:** The BLM expects to make the Gold Rock Mine Project Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) available to the public in summer 2016. The proposed project would be located in western White Pine County, in the same geographic area as the reclaimed and closed Easy Junior Mine. The project area consists of a total of 18,745 acres of BLM-administered lands with the majority of the mine facilities located within a fenced mine area totaling 8,757 acres. A total of 3,946 acres of disturbance would be authorized. The majority of the area would be reclaimed. The action alternatives were developed to help reduce project-related impacts to greater sage-grouse and mule deer. The projected mining period is 10 years, with associated construction, closure, reclamation and post-closure monitoring periods extending the project life to approximately 48 years. Midway Gold US Inc. estimates that the project would create between 150-250 jobs.

### Notices and Exploration –

Operations are underway the Helen A mine in Egan Canyon.

DHI Minerals is authorized to conduct Notice-level operations near Green Springs.

Summit Mining has two authorized operations, Cherry Creek Central and Cherry Creek East, both near Cherry Creek.

SR Minerals is conducting operations in Mining Canyon on the east slope of the Diamond Range near Legacy Bay State Mine.

McKewen Mining will soon begin work on a new authorized Notice west of Cherry Creek. They have requested bond release and closure for their Limousine Butte project, which will require inspection for reclamation work on 111 drill holes and associated roads.

The EA for the Gunman exploration Plan of Operations is being prepared for public comment. The drilling project is near Strawberry Road on the eastern slope of the Diamond Range. Cypress Development is the proponent.

## Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Ely District Update

### Mineral Materials –

The BLM Ely District, Caliente Field Office is working with the Nevada Department of Transportation to obtain rights-of-way for a new community gravel pit to serve the residents of Panaca, Nev., and surrounding area. The previous community pit is located on public lands identified for disposal in the Ely Resource Management Plan. Lands identified for disposal are withdrawn from mineral entry in accordance with the Lincoln County Conservation, Recreation, and Development Act of 2004.

### Oil & Gas –

Oil & Gas Exploration/Development: The BLM is awaiting a list of nominated parcels for a proposed December 2016 lease sale. The BLM in December 2015 generated \$6,676.08 from the sale of three parcels totaling 3,640.72 acres. A complete summary of the parcels offered and the winning bid(s) is available online at <http://on.doi.gov/1oXmCgT>.

Western Oil Exploration has requested reinstatement of one oil and gas lease and extension of another in Newark Valley west of Ely. When the leases are in authorized status, the operator will submit three new APDs (Application for Permit to Drill).

Applications for Permits to Drill (APD): The BLM Ely District, Basin and Range National Monument in February 2016 issued a Decision Record/ Finding of No Significant Impact and Final Environmental Assessment (EA) for Makoil, Inc.'s Murphy's Gap APD Well No. 14-23. The DR/FONSI and EA are available for review online at <http://1.usa.gov/1Klxaku>.

The BLM has approved an APD for a Bestoso Oil & Gas well in White River Valley. Work is expected to begin in spring/summer 2016.

A third-party contractor is preparing an EA for Envy Energy's APD for the Black Point East #1 well in Railroad Valley.

The BLM is preparing an EA for Nevada Wildcat's APD for the Robber's Roost well in Butte Valley.

### NOXIOUS/INVASIVE WEED MANAGEMENT

This year's noxious weed inventory is complete. Yellow starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*) has been identified near Telegraph Canyon. Yellow starthistle, a Nevada Category A noxious weed proven detrimental to agriculture in neighboring states, was not known in the district until this year. Containment/eradication is a top priority.

An assistance agreement modification with Tri-County Weed Control will fund weed inventory, treatment and monitoring through June 5, 2016.

## **RANGELAND MANAGEMENT**

Rangeland Monitoring: BLM Ely District staff continues to monitor and assess rangeland conditions associated with forage and water availability and coordinate with permittees regarding grazing management actions associated with drought conditions.

Term Permit Renewals (TPRs): Staff continues to fully process and renew TPRs, plan range improvement projects (riparian and spring developments, fences, and more), and process grazing applications and transfers. Links to documents are located on the BLM website at: [https://www.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa\\_register.do](https://www.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa_register.do)

## **RECREATION & TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLANNING**

Ash Springs Recreation Site: The BLM Ely District, Caliente Field Office is developing a management plan for the Ash Springs Recreation Site, located alongside U.S. Highway 93 about 100 miles north of Las Vegas. The public input period concluded in March 2016 and the field office is preparing a draft environmental assessment. When completed, the plan will provide management direction for the BLM-administered portion of Ash Springs and address visitor usage and public safety, endangered and sensitive species habitat, water quality, and compliance with existing local, state and federal laws. Meantime, the site remains closed to the public for up to two years. The temporary closure was announced in a *Federal Register* notice published Wednesday, April 13, 2016.

Lincoln County Partners Multi-Purpose Non-Motorized Trail System: The BLM expects in summer 2016 to release the final environmental assessment. The proposed system would enhance access to public lands by constructing new multipurpose hiking and mountain biking trails, thereby improving non-motorized recreational opportunities in Lincoln County. Trail and trailhead development would not reduce access to or conflict with current recreational opportunities. Additional information is available at <http://1.usa.gov/1nesx12>.

Ely District Cave Management Plan and Preliminary Environmental Assessment: The BLM Ely District is preparing the Ely District Cave Management Plan and Final Environmental Assessment (EA) that will provide for recreation while providing guidance for the long-term oversight and management of cave resources, districtwide. The plan will identify specific management actions for recreational use, scientific research and resource management.

Travel Management Planning: The BLM Ely District, Egan Field Office is preparing a plan for approximately 1,428,000 acres within the Huntington, Jakes, Long, Newark and Ruby valleys, in White Pine County. The BLM will release the draft plan for public comment.



## RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCILS

Mojave-Southern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council (RAC): The Mojave-Southern Great Basin RAC's Basin and Range National Monument Subcommittee will meet at 6:30 p.m., Wednesday, May 11, in the Alamo Annex courtroom, 121 Joshua tree, in Alamo.

The Mojave-Southern Great Basin RAC's Planning and Recreation subcommittees will meet Wednesday, May 18, in the Midway conference room at Henderson City Hall, 240 Water Street, in Henderson. The Planning Subcommittee will meet at 3 p.m. The Recreation Subcommittee will meet at 4:10 p.m.

The BLM will meet with the Mojave-Southern Great Basin RAC at 9:30 a.m., Thursday, May 19, at the Toll Brothers Clubhouse, 3190 Mantua Village, in Henderson.

## WILDERNESS

Lands with Wilderness Characteristics: The BLM is performing project by project inventory updates for Lands with Wilderness Character.

## SPECIAL LEGISLATION

Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA): The nomination period for SNPLMA Round 16 closed April 29. The Sub-Group Committees meet in May to rank the nominations and make a recommendation to the Partners Working Group for funding. Local governmental entities may seek funds for parks, trails, and natural areas in portions of Carson City and Clark, Lincoln, and White Pine counties. Federal agencies may seek funds for capital improvements, conservation initiatives, and restoration projects in eastern Nevada. Federal, State, and other agencies may seek funding for hazardous fuels reduction in the Lake Tahoe Basin, the Carson Range, and the Spring Mountain Range. Federal agencies may seek funding for acquisition of environmentally sensitive land statewide.

Lincoln County Archaeological Initiative (LCAI): The period to submit proposals under Round 9 of LCAI concluded March 18. The Archaeological Resources Team (ART) met in April to rank the proposals and will make a recommendation for funding to the Partners Working Group in May. Proposals under the initiative focus on the inventory, evaluation, protection and management of unique archaeological resources in Lincoln County. For more information, contact Program Manager Carol Bass at (775) 289-1803 or [cbass@blm.gov](mailto:cbass@blm.gov).

###

*Contact Chris Hanefeld, BLM Ely District public affairs specialist, at (775) 289-1842 or [chanefel@blm.gov](mailto:chanefel@blm.gov) for more information on these and other projects/programs in the District.*